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STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN ED CASE OF HAWAII WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2005

RECOGNIZING THE COMMITMENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO THE RECOVERY AND ACCOUNTING FOR AMERICANS WHO ARE PRISONERS OF WAR OR MISSING

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague yielding me time, and it humbles me to follow the previous speaker in light of his service.

I rise in full support of this resolution and wish to fully associate myself with the comments of my colleagues with respect to the heroic rescue missions carried out 60 years ago by units of the U.S. Army in the Philippines. It allows us to follow anew not only their efforts but also the heroic effort of many, many members of the Filipino citizenry, including the Filipino scouts who rose up and fought alongside U.S. Armed Forces in the Philippines during the Second World War and allied themselves very much with the Allied effort.

I also want to take the opportunity in this resolution to highlight, as the previous speaker said, the work undone, on a broader scale, which includes almost 2,000 of our own still unaccounted for in the Vietnam War. In that spirit, I want to highlight the great commitment shown by our Joint POW/MIA Command, JPAC, which is operated by the Defense POW missing personnel office.

JPAC is headquartered in Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. It was activated in October of 2003, and its mission is to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all Americans missing, worldwide, as a result of our Nation's previous conflicts.

Of course, the highest priority of JPAC is return of any living American that remains a prisoner of war, but equally important is bringing resolution to the families who still await news of their loved ones.

JPAC was created from the merger of the Central Identification Laboratory-Hawaii and the Joint Task Force Full Accounting and contains almost 425 personnel. One-quarter are Navy civilians and the rest handpicked soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines. Every individual attached to JPAC is chosen through the specialized skills necessary for the command's unique mission.

Some brief facts about JPAC and the Central Identification Lab-Hawaii. Even today, they are still identifying roughly two individuals each week formerly listed as missing.

They have identified remains from World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Cold War, and in each of those cases where it is possible, repatriation ceremonies, with a full honor guard, are held nearly every month at Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii. As the remains are brought off the plane in flag-draped caskets and moved to ground transportation, a multiservice honor guard salutes the remains while family members, veterans and members of the Armed Forces offer their respects.

It is also true that JPAC's work extends well into the realm of diplomacy because especially with the countries of Asia, where we had former enemies, JPAC and its efforts have often meant the initial unifying factor, the item on which we can all agree, and they have definitely led in many cases to rapprochement between previous enemies.

In addition to its primary mission of identifying, recovering and repatriating the remains of the POWs and MIAs, JPAC personnel also support nontraditional and humanitarian missions as well. For example, in the recent tsunami effort in southeast Asia, JPAC deployed their two teams of eight people, including a forensic anthropologist, forensic dentist and other specialists to assist the Government of Thailand to identify and recover the bodies of more than 3,500 individuals who died there.

I have here for inclusion with my remarks at this point an article that recently appeared in the Honolulu Star Bulletin entitled "Joint POW-MIA Accounting Group Using DNA Expertise," which acutely describes some of these humanitarian efforts and which contains this very poignant remark: "Everybody is given a name when you are born, and everybody should have a name when you die. That's what we do."

[From the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Jan. 21, 2005]
Joint POW-MIA Accounting Group Using
DNA Expertise
(By Craig Gima)

PHUKET, THAILAND.--At the Tsunami Victims Assistance Center, unanswered questions hang in the air around the bulletin boards where family members have posted pictures of missing friends and relatives.

The photos--a haunting reminder of lives probably lost--mean there are lives in limbo, families holding on to hope, however faint, unwilling to accept death without proof.

The large crowds of family members that gathered here daily right after the tsunami are gone now. The people who show up are sometimes friends continuing the search or, as in the case of

a visitor earlier in the day, a brother who believes his sister needs his help.

"If his sister is dead, he doesn't want to know now," said Verity Cattan-Poole, a volunteer at the center who speaks both Thai and English. "He wants to find her. He thinks possibly that she's somewhere and lost her memory, and he wants to be there to help her."

"In their heart of hearts, I think they know," Cattan-Poole said. But "if you have a loved one who has died, you need closure."

A little more than two hours north of the center, an international team of forensic scientists that includes members of the Hawaii-based Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command are trying to bring closure to families.

JPAC is best known for its work in recovering and identifying the remains of U.S. service members from Vietnam and other wars. But it has deployed teams before to disasters, including the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the Pentagon, the Korean Air crash in Guam and the bombing of a Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1983.

Two teams of eight people, including a forensic anthropologist, a forensic dentist and mortuary affairs specialists, have been helping the Thai government identify and recover the bodies of more than 5,300 people who died in the tsunami.

Most of the work is done at Wat Yan Yao, a Buddhist temple about two hours north of Phuket. JPAC also helped coordinate the delivery of supplies and materials such as lights and tents from the U.S. military's relief effort and is helping to set up a temporary morgue, donated by Norway, near the Phuket airport.

On Wednesday, JPAC members joined thousands of Buddhist monks at a candlelight service at a stadium in Takua Pa, a city in the province north of Phuket where about 4,000 people died.

Organizers said the memorial service was multi-denominational, offering prayers to comfort sur-

vivors and to help those who died find happiness and peace in the afterlife.

Many of the team members are now returning to Hawaii. A smaller group will remain for an undetermined time.

At a briefing in Hawaii earlier this month, Gen. Montague Winfield, the commander of the unit, said his men and women were prepared to go when they saw the extent of the tsunami devastation.

Winfield said they had just finished a plan on how to deploy quickly in the event of mass casualties anywhere in the world.

Still, while the JPAC team members had planned what to take and to get their equipment there in the event of an emergency, "nobody can adequately or fully prepare for something of this magnitude," said Dr. Robert Mann, deputy scientific director at JPAC.

"In this situation here, you're going to be dealing with a lot of children, and a lot of people here have kids," he said.

Mann, who was at the same briefing as the general, said the forensic scientists in Hawaii are experts at extracting and using DNA to identify remains. They are also bone and teeth experts.

Bone structure, Mann explained, can show whether a person is of Caucasian or Asian descent, a man or a woman. Dental records also can help with identification when fingerprints are not available.

"Everybody is given a name when you are born, and everybody should have a name when you die," Mann said. "That's what we do."

JPAC is a vital part of our Nation's ongoing commitment to its service members, and we in Hawaii are proud and humbled by their commitment to their mission. This mission on behalf of all of us must continue until every last unaccounted American citizen is accounted for.